



## HEALTH ASSESSMENT

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- About 40,000 uncontrolled hazardous-waste sites have been reported to the federal government. Additionally, thousands of inadvertent environmental releases of toxins occur each year.
- More than 1,600 hazardous waste sites are included on the National Priorities List (NPL) and are targeted for clean up by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). About 15 million people live within 1 mile of NPL sites.

### WHAT HAS ATSDR ACCOMPLISHED?

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) public health assessment process reviews available information about hazardous substances onsite and evaluates whether exposure causes harm to people. ATSDR assesses public health issues for every site included or proposed on the NPL and EPA maintains the information.

ATSDR looks at three primary sources of information in the public health assessment process:

- Environmental data, including information about contaminants and how people could come in contact with them.
- Health data, including available information on community-wide rates of illness, disease, and death compared with national and state rates.
- Reports evaluating if certain sites affect the health and/or quality of life in communities.

ATSDR's public health assessment process identifies health studies or other public health actions that might be indicated. The public health assessment process enables ATSDR to provide advice to EPA and other federal, state, and local agencies on actions to prevent or reduce people's exposure to hazardous substances.

In 2002, ATSDR and its cooperative agreement states performed more than 1,481 health assessment activities and prepared 159 public health assessment documents for 122 sites. Of the sites ATSDR assessed, 28.5% were found to pose a public health hazard. Of the 122 sites, 88 were NPL sites, 34 non-NPL, 4 were sites for which the community or others had petitioned ATSDR to conduct a public health assessment, and 6 were sites that were covered by the *Resource Conservation and Recovery Act* (RCRA). RCRA is a legislative act that addresses the control of hazardous substances at operating facilities. ATSDR's resulting site-specific recommendations have been widely accepted by individual sites.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

ATSDR is developing a certification program for those who conduct health assessments at sites. The certification program, piloted in 2003 and implemented in 2004, will provide minimum training requirements and certification testing. The health assessor certification protocol is intended to standardize the basic skills for health assessors. Continuing education requirements are also being established.

*For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/program](http://www.cdc.gov/program)*

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